Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee:	Rosie Head
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Interviewer:	John Dittmer
Videographer:	John Bishop
Length:	01:18:59

[Sound quality is uneven throughout the interview, almost as though the recording is voice-activated, and there is quite a bit of static.]

John Dittmer: Okay.

John Bishop: You're on.

John Dittmer: This is going to be fun. Today is Wednesday, March thirteenth, 2013. My name is John Dittmer, and I am here in Tchula, Mississippi, with videographer John Bishop to interview Mrs. Rosie Head, a leading civil rights activist in the Holmes County, Mississippi, Movement. This interview will become part of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Head, we are delighted to have you here today and we thank you for taking the time to talk with us.

Rosie Head: [Thank you].

JD: I'd like to begin by asking you about your family. Were you born and raised in Holmes County?

Rosie Head: I was born in Holmes County.

JD: And tell us, what did your parents do for a living?

RH: My dad was a carpenter and a sharecropper. And we worked in the cotton fields and cornfields and the gardens that we called truck patches. We raised all our food and cows, horses, mules, chickens, and hogs.

JD: A real farm, then?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: Did you have brothers and sisters?

RH: I had two brothers and seven sisters.

JD: And where are you on that chain? [Train whistle blows in background]

RH: I'm about the sixth.

JD: The sixth, uh-huh. [Train whistle blows] You have a number of members of your family—[speaking to JB] do you want to wait until the train goes by?

JB: Yeah, maybe we should.

JD: [Laughs] Yeah.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JD: Okay. Alright. So, your father was a carpenter. What did he do—built houses or what was—?

RH: Built houses.

JD: Uh-huh. And did he have a crew? Who was he working with?

RH: Mostly he worked by himself during that time. Later on in life, he decided to work with another guy that was a friend of his, a Mr. Horton.

JD: Uh-huh. We interviewed Mr. Bruce the other day, and he was talking about the work that he was doing as a carpenter.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: Did your father apprentice himself to anyone, or was he just naturally talented there?

RH: He was just naturally talented.

JD: What was it like to grow up in this town?

RH: It was—I grew up in Lexington. I was six years old when I left Lexington. And I moved to Greenwood. My father hired himself out to a farmer, or a plantation owner, to keep their houses up. And I lived in Greenwood about ten years.

JD: Okay. Well, tell us about Greenwood. What was it—a big change from Lexington, I imagine.

RH: Yeah, it was, it was. But I was—we lived out in the country. And every once in a while, we'd get to go to town. And it was exciting to go and see all the things going on in Greenwood. But mostly we worked out on the farm, picking and chopping cotton. And until we were old enough to go in the fields, we were babysitting the younger children. And we went to—I started working in the fields when I was seven years old.

JD: You were chopping and picking when you were seven?

RH: Chopping and picking.

JD: Wow.

RH: I'd rather be out with the crowd than to be sitting in the house babysitting.

JD: Yeah.

RH: So, I proved that I could do it, and they let me go.

JD: Yeah. So, it was a real family affair then.

RH: It was.

JD: Tell us about going to school.

RH: I went to—the first year, when I was six years old, I didn't get to go to school. I was supposed to go to a school called Hickory Springs in Lexington, but you had to walk across a creek to get to the school, and I was too little to go, so I had to stay home. And when we moved to Greenwood, just before I turned seven, and I started to school in that January. And we walked to school about five miles. And when I was about ten, they started giving us buses, but we still had to walk about two or three miles to the bus stop.

JD: That's quite a sacrifice to make for an education.

RH: Yes.

JD: Most young kids today wouldn't know what to do [0:05:00] in a situation like that.

RH: We walked. We went to a school that was a church, and it was just the one room, and all the grades, pre-primer through eighth grade, was in that school.

JD: How many teachers did you have?

RH: One teacher.

JD: One teacher for all eight grades?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: And what were your favorite subjects?

RH: I always loved reading.

JD: Uh-huh. The church was an important part of the community. Was it in your family, as well?

RH: It was. We used to have to get up and walk to Sunday School every Sunday morning. The regular service would be one Sunday a month, but Sunday School was every Sunday. And if it was, like, during the summer, when it was hot, the dust was like—like, up to here on your legs, like. And it was real hot, but we had to carry our shoes in our hands and carry a wet cloth so that when we'd get to the church we could wash our legs and feet and put our socks and shoes back on.

JD: You were wearing your Sunday best.

RH: Yes.

JD: Yeah. We're going to be talking about civil rights and the racial situation in Mississippi. What was segregation like? Were you aware of segregation when you were in Greenwood?

RH: Oh, yes, very much so. My mom cooked for the plantation owner. And the younger children—there were three of us that was too little at first to go to the fields, and we had to walk across with her to the plantation owner's house. And I remember he had this little girl. Her name was Corinne, and my mom had to call her "Miss Corinne." She could play out with us, but we couldn't come in the house. But she could play outside with us.

JD: And you had an understanding of what was going on, now, or did you have to be told that there were certain things you couldn't do?

RH: Then we knew, because my family was the kind that talked at home to all of the children to make sure they knew what the rules for our family was and what we could and couldn't do. So, we were told our place and what we could do and what we couldn't do.

JD: Was the plantation owner fair, in terms of settlement?

RH: Oh, no! I can remember we would farm that land and we would pick—we could pick at least a bale of cotton a day easily.

JD: Wow!

RH: We would like pick—sometimes we'd work on Saturday mornings and we would pick our six bales of cotton. And at the end of the year, like the day before Christmas, they would—everybody—the farmer would be called into the office of the plantation owner. And we would have made about—rather, we were supposed to get half of what he made on the farm. We would do from seventy-five to eighty bales of cotton a year. And I can remember every time my dad would come back home. They would—like, he had to walk up to the barn or the shop where they paid off, or where they'd call you and tell you if you made any money.

And my dad would always come back, and when he'd get back home, we all were waiting up for him. And he'd sit down and take his hat off. And he always called my mom "Baby." And he just said, "Baby, we came out in the hole again." And he said that man, he said he could just hear him every time he would go in, would say, "Well, Robert, I'm sorry, but you didn't clear nothing. You came out in the hole."

JD: Did they furnish you and everything? Was there a company store, or did they deduct all—?

RH: There was a company store. And they gave us—it was what, twelve of us—and they gave us thirty-five dollars a month to eat and you could get that much from the store.

JD: So, it was pretty much the same situation that had been going on for almost a hundred years then?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: As a kid, what was your reaction when you saw that you had been cheated, your family had been cheated?

RH: Oh, it was a hurting thing. Everybody knew that that's the time we looked forward to, Christmas, and we would get something, toys or something. But they made sure you get food and stuff like that. You could go to the store and get that. [0:10:00] And I remember my mom used to make dolls for us out of the sacks that you buy flour in. She would make our clothes from those flour sacks and meal sacks, and she would make dolls for us.

And we would find our dolls and apples and our orange and some nuts, raisins—I can remember that so well. They were the best raisins I've ever eaten! Every Christmas! And you could smell it all over the house, because when they'd bring it in, they would put it in the closet so wouldn't nobody mess with it until the right time. And that's what we would look forward to.

JD: So, your folks tried to give you as normal a childhood as they could under the circumstances?

RH: They did. They did.

JD: But there was a lot going on then. You had, of course, the lynching, the murder of Emmett Till.

RH: Yes.

JD: And he was about your age, wasn't he?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: Tell us about your learning about it and your conversations in the family. What did this all mean?

RH: I can remember we lived in this house that was across—behind the boss, the plantation owner's house, across the levee. And we had a radio. We didn't have a TV then. We

had a radio, and we heard it on the radio. Well, my mom heard it. She was cooking and she heard it and she called everybody inside. Because Money, right across from where he got, where he was at this store, well, I went to school there. That's the school I went to, and we would walk over across the railroad to that store every day.

JD: Oh, wow.

RH: Get some pennies up, nickels, and we'd walk over there.

JD: So, you knew Milam, or Bryant—Mrs. Bryant, Mrs. Milam—Mrs. Bryant, yes.

RH: Yes. She waited on us, um-hmm.

JD: Carolyn Bryant. What kind of a person was she?

RH: She just would kind of shoo us aside, you know, when we'd go in the store, like she was thinking we're going try to pick up something or something like that. She'd make sure you'd stay on one side and wait your turn to come spend your penny or nickel or whatever you had.

JD: She was afraid you'd steal from her.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: Not a nice person.

RH: Not at all.

JB: And did you know Emmett Till, the family that Emmett Till was staying with?

RH: No, I didn't. Because the school—that was when we had a school bus. That's when we started getting bused. I lived near Greenwood, about a mile out of Greenwood, and Money is about eight or ten miles. That's where we went on the school bus, up there. I didn't know many people up there.

JD: I've talked with a number of civil rights workers, and they said, you know, that Till was about their age, and they realized that it could be them.

RH: Exactly.

JD: Did your folks give you any special instructions after that?

RH: They let us know to stay in our place and do what they tell us to do. And my dad always said that God was going to take care of us if we do the right thing. And we just did what he asked us to do and what he said was right for us to do.

JD: Um-hmm. So, you stayed out of trouble for a while, then, until you started causing trouble. [Laughs]

RH: [Laughs] Yes.

JD: So, in the late 1950s, you were what—a teenager? What were you doing then?

RH: Still chopping and picking cotton. And then, my dad finally saved up enough money to buy a new car, a '57 Chevrolet, brand new. And—but you know how he had to pay something down and—?

JD: Yeah, yeah.

RH: And the boss, he had gotten where he wanted the men to come and work, but he wouldn't let them come in his office to pick up the paycheck. He would ask them to send their wives to pick up the paycheck. But—

JD: Why was that?

RH: He, ah—um, my mom said he tried to talk to the black women. He liked black women [14:26], wanted to use them, rather. But my dad refused to let my mom go and pick his check up, and he went up there to get it. And he refused to give it to him and told him—he had asked him for it and he had laid his keys down on the counter—and said the man picked his keys up and he told him he wasn't getting his car, his keys *or* his check.

And he told him, said, "Well, it's alright if that's what you want to do," but [0:15:00] he won't need to be paying him a check anymore, because he wouldn't be there. But he thought he had the keys and he thought he couldn't leave, but he had a second pair of keys at home. And we left that night. We left that plantation and moved to Tchula. Had an aunt living down in Tchula, and we moved there. Got what we could in the car and moved down there. And a neighbor kept the furniture, but I understand that he scared her the next morning, and she just gave up the furniture, told him she had it. So, we had to start all over again then.

JD: Did he try to get you back, say you owe him money or anything?

RH: He tried to get the car away from us, but it was—you know, then, they had contacts everywhere. They could talk to this farmer or this person, and they'd stop you from getting work there or getting any kind of money. So, my dad lost that car, and that was his way of getting around and making money doing carpenter work. And that was hard for him.

JD: Was it a relief to be away from the plantation and in Tchula?

RH: It was, because most of the people, black people, around Tchula, the project had been given to people then down in Mileston, and we were able to get one of those houses.

JD: And did you farm there?

RH: We did.

JD: Circumstances were better?

RH: Much better.

JD: And—well, then what happened? You're in Tchula now. How old are you?

RH: Oh, I was seventeen. And I kept—there were lots of people around that you could go and chop and pick cotton by the day, and I did that for about six or seven years. I picked cotton

and chopped for a dollar and fifty cents a day, and picked cotton for a dollar a hundred. And I could pick about 500 a day.

JD: Wow.

RH: I was just—

JD: Now, did you—did that money go all to the family, or did you have some of it?

RH: It had to go to help the family.

JD: So, everybody was pitching in?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: So, when did you go out on your own?

RH: Ah, when did I—in 1964, ’63 and ’64. We started talking together with some people from Greenwood about the Movement, that different people were coming into Mississippi to help people learn to register to vote. So, we started going to Greenwood, like certain nights they would have meetings, and certain days they would have meetings there. And we started going there until we got a young man to come to our area, and we started having meetings down there. We had a Freedom School. One of the churches in that area let us use the church to have our meetings and everything.

JD: Okay, let me just back up a little bit, because the question I’m always asking is: What motivated you to become involved in the Civil Rights Movement? Why—because not very many people did early on, and especially—you were probably one of the first around here, right?

RH: Yes.

JD: You heard about the meetings in Greenwood?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: And then, did several of you go?

RH: Yes, we had been talking about it since—I heard my dad and other people talking since Emmett Till about, "We're going to have to do something." And we—it just kept, you know, not doing anything. And finally, it just came to the point where they found something that *could* help and they would tell us all about it. And I just got interested in it, just like it was a way—I knew what the people that was in charge, I knew what they thought of us, and how they was treating us, and I just knew that was a better way. And I just went out there, hoping and praying.

JD: So, what—do you remember did you first go to a meeting in Greenwood in '62?

RH: '63.

JD: Who were the SNCC people who were—?

RH: Ah, John Ball.

JD: Um-hmm.

RH: And, uh, I'm missing this fellow's name; he was a Block.

JD: Sam Block?

RH: Sam Block, yes. And Stokely Carmichael, Bob Moses, and Lawrence Guyot. There's a lot of people, different people, that I'm not getting their names.

JD: Well, that's sort of—Willie Peacock, I think, was there.

RH: Yes, uh-huh, he was.

JD: And—

RH: Hollis Watkins.

JD: Yeah, yes. [0:20:00] Hollis is still going strong, too, isn't he? [Laughs]

RH: Yes, he is. He's a good man.

JD: Yes, he is. So, you went to the meetings and—well, tell me about a typical meeting. What went on in the meeting?

RH: We would just sit around and talk about the things that was unfair to black people, like the segregated places, the schools and the different places, like the courthouse and the water fountains and things around, bathrooms, restaurants and things that we couldn't use. We talked about how we were second-class citizens but we were having to pay taxes like first-class citizens. And we talked about things that could be available to us but we just had to be prepared to get it. And we talked about how—what we had to do to get registered to vote, and that's where the power was, that we could get some of the things that we needed if we were first-class citizens, and that's what would make us first-class citizens.

JD: Um-hmm. Did you work in the voter registration campaign in Greenwood? Or did you wait until it came here?

RH: I waited until it came.

JD: Um-hmm. I believe it was John Ball, was it, who was—?

RH: Um-hmm. John Ball came to Holmes County.

JD: And, of course, there was the [21:28] team.

RH: Um-hmm, yes.

JD: Were you aware of what was going on then?

RH: Yes. Mr. Mitchell was very close.

JD: Oh, really?

RH: Yeah, and Mrs. Carnegie, his sister, they were all close people. We went to church together.

JD: Mrs. Carnegie was real active real early, wasn't she?

RH: She was. She was.

JD: Yeah, I was reading about her.

RH: Um-hmm, she was—

JD: A real warrior.

RH: Something else.

JD: So, what about the other people who were—Hartman Turnbow was a name that comes up. Tell me about Turnbow.

RH: Mr. Turnbow was—there's just one Hartman Turnbow. He was fearless. He would get up in the meeting, and when he started talking, everybody would catch on. He would talk and tell all the things that people had been doing to black people, and he would tell them and ask them, "Do you want to have that going on always, or do you want to do something about it?" And he would get people all stirred up, and they would be *ready* to go. If a group, however many is there, if they say they're going to be there in the morning and we're going, that's what they would do. Everybody would be ready to go.

JD: You hear lots of Turnbow stories. I heard one from Josephine Disparti. Do you remember her?

RH: :Yes, yes, I know her.

JD: She was a nurse and she lived with Turnbow for a while.

RH: Right, um-hmm.

JD: She was saying that there was one meeting where they were all kinds of opposition to what he was doing. So, at some point, he gets out his pistol and lays it on the table and says, "Let's vote!" [Laughter]

RH: [Laughs] Yes, he did! He did! He just—whatever he believed in and whatever he stood for, he did it wholeheartedly, 100 percent. Wasn't scared of nobody! And he predicted all the things that we see now. He predicted it all. He used to come by my house and just sit and talk. After things had kind of quieted down some for years on—he was getting older—he would tell me about what to expect. He said, "I'll be gone." But he told me how many prisons were going up, and all our young black boys was going be in those prisons.

JD: He saw that coming?

RH: He saw it, and it happened.

JD: Ralthus Hayes?

RH: Ralthus Hayes was a quiet, kind of well-mannered man. He had to think things out completely before he would do anything, but he was always willing to do what he could. He would try to help the rest of them to plan. Say, if there was something going on that he thought everybody might get locked up, he and a couple of other guys would stay back so that they could be there to help get them out of jail if they got locked up. He was kind of a quiet person, but he was always willing to do things. A good farmer.

JD: So, his personality was sort of the opposite of Mr. Turnbow's.

RH: Just the opposite.

JD: And yet they were both leaders at that time.

RH: Yes, they were.

JD: What about statewide leaders? Did you go to meetings where Medgar Evers spoke?

RH: I did. [0:25:00]

JD: And when you heard the news that he had been assassinated, what—?

RH: Oh, boy.

JD: What was going through?

RH: It was like a family member had been killed. Because we, you know, we had been used to hearing way off where they would lynch people, and they would burn their houses down, and take over families. This guy told me—I was working in the cotton field, picking cotton. And he told me about how this white farmer had—every time he—like, he would be in the house with his family, and if it was wintertime, they'd be able to not do anything then. He said that—that was the worst thing I've ever heard. He said that this farmer would come in his house, and he would have to leave home and let him stay there and have his way with his wife. And he couldn't come back until he said it was time for him to come back.

JD: It's like days of slavery.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: But there was now a Movement going on to do something about it.

RH: Yes.

JD: Aaron Henry? Was he—?

RH: Yes.

JD: Someone—was he around much?

RH: Yeah, he came several times.

JD: Well, let's talk a little bit about the Council of Federated Organizations, and we'll move up—I want to get into politics, because you were very active there. But there was, for example, the Freedom Vote in the fall of '63, where Aaron Henry and Ed King were running, and you had a big campaign for a mock election to prove to the world that Mississippi blacks would vote if given the chance.

RH: Right, um-hmm.

JD: Were you active in that campaign?

RH: Yes, I was.

JD: Tell us about what you did.

RH: I went around canvassing the communities to get people, to make sure people understood what the mock election was about and how important it was to get out, to come out, and vote. And I helped out in the school that was training people what to do and how to do if they come out and there was any kind of confrontation with the white folks. We would know—they would know what to do and not to get in any trouble. And we went all over Holmes County, all out in the hills, the Lexington part, and Durant and everywhere, to get people to come out and register and to try to vote.

JD: Were some of them afraid, even with the mock election?

RH: Some of them were afraid because they were living in this plantation owner's house, and they were thinking they wouldn't have a place to live. And some people got put off their plantations, and we had to find places for them to live. And then, there were people from the North that were sending food and clothing and money down, and we would help them out that way.

But I remember several houses that we had gone to, and we were then talking about Head Start, trying to get Head Start. And we had to go to each house, whether they accept us or not. And we would go to the white farmers' houses, and they would always make you—you know, you gotta go to the backdoor. So, they would either come out and curse you out or say no, their children couldn't go. But they just said, "You nigger, get off my property," and curse you out, and that was it.

JD: So, you were canvassing all the houses to talk about Head Start?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: In other words, it was not—it was supposed to be an integrated program, open to everybody.

RH: Um-hmm. You had to do that to be able to get federal money. But for the election, we just had to make sure we got everybody out and to find out who needed a ride to come to vote in the mock election.

JD: Where were the polling places for the mock election?

RH: In Thornton and in Mileston. They were just—they were like all over the county.

JD: Were they in barbershops, beauty parlors—?

RH: Um-hmm. Anybody's place that had a place that you could use.

JD: So, the vote sent a message. But still, at this time, despite years of organizing, why, the white supremacists still had the upper hand.

RH: Uh-huh.

JD: And the federal government wasn't really that interested in what was going on, or didn't seem to be interested. And the Ku Klux Klan had revived. Was there any Klan activity in Holmes County?

RH: Oh, yes. I can remember there were about six of us [0:30:00] at the—we called it the Holmes County Community Center that a friend came down from California and built for us. And we would all be there working late at night, trying to get out newsletters and get things ready to put in the mail the next day. And several nights, we would be just—there was a little sleeping quarters upstairs there. And we would be just getting settled down and we would hear trucks out there, turning around and around on the yard in front of the building.

And then, they would shoot up in the air. And when we'd hear that, you know, it would just scare us half to death, and we'd go and try to call some of the men to come. And they would just continually, you know, be shouting all kinds of language out at us and telling us to get out of there and what they were going to do to us. And by the time they see—we were like—the center set across the railroad track, and they could see every car that turned off. By the time they see somebody coming that way, they would set the cross out there and get back in the truck, and then light the cross and shoot up in the air and leave.

JD: All intimidation.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: So, you really were living in fear for your lives.

RH: All the time! Even, like, when I would go home, I would—the adults would take turns sitting up, watching to make sure, because they were famous for throwing those—what do you call them? Cocktails?

JD: Molotov cocktails?

RH: Um-hmm. Yeah, they would throw them in people's houses.

JD: How did you overcome your fear?

RH: Ah, just praying and knowing that it was nothing else to do. You couldn't go back.

JD: Well, because things seemed to be still in the hands of the white power structure without any assistance from outside, there was a decision made to have the Summer Project in 1964, bringing hundreds of students down from the North—most of them turned out to be white—to really shine the spotlight on Mississippi and to get the nation outraged about what was going on. And they'd be working in freedom schools, voter registration, the new Freedom Democratic Party, which we'll be talking about, and also in community centers. There were—I

read where there were about thirty Freedom Summer volunteers in Holmes County. Tell us about what Freedom Summer was like here and your role in it.

RH: Ah, it was like I spent most of my—almost 24 hours a day in that building with those people, doing whatever there was to do. We would just be planning who was going where and what we had to do to get people to come out and learn how to go and try to register. And we would all get together and get in an old car, or whatever car we could find, and go around canvassing the community. That was the most we did, you know, canvas and get people out. And we would have meetings in different communities to talk to people so they would understand and wouldn't be scared to come out. And we let them know that we all would be in it together; whatever happened, we were going to help them out. If they didn't have a place to stay, actually, we were going to be able to help them one way or the other.

JD: So, the volunteers were staying with local people then?

RH: Local people.

JD: How did whites react to this invasion, as they called it?

RH: Sometimes we would go downtown or any public place, and they would just stand around, just like—and, you know, they would be talking and screaming out "niggers" at you and everything, and calling them "nigger lovers." I'll never forget we went—we walked from Valley State from over at Itta Bena to Jackson. And there were people, when we left Tougaloo, that railroad that goes down State Street, there were people on those railroads up on those boxcars, and they was throwing big rocks down at us. But they would just do it enough for it not to hit you, but we wouldn't know whether it was going to hit you or not. And they had guns. They had everything! And they was calling us some of everything. And the police and the highway patrolmen were right there, but they didn't say a word.

JD: Was this during the Meredith March?

RH: It was.

JD: Yeah, yeah. Were there any extreme racial incidents [0:35:00] in Holmes County during Freedom Summer that you remember, people being arrested or beaten?

RH: Yes, there was Sam House. He got arrested several times. They had to hire this black guy in Lexington. We called him Fats. He would, if you just walk down the streets, he would pick them up and put them in jail.

And there was a lot of times that they got—we were marching, and they would come out, upset about it. We would be marching and boycotting some stores out there, and there was a time when there was this lady that they had taken her by each one of her legs and just pulled her around and exposed her whole body to everybody.

JD: One of the things that was going on that summer—I mean, Holmes County was unique in many ways in terms of the Civil Rights Movement—but a guy from California named Abe Osheroff came down to build a community center.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: Tell us about what that was like from your end, seeing these strange folks up there going to work.

RH: It was—we couldn't *believe* it, that someone would come and give us a whole new building like that. My dad helped to build that center, and he—Abe was a good man, real kind-hearted, kind of big, looked big and serious-looking, but he was a real kind-hearted man. We got to be real good friends.

And seeing that building go up—people would come from all over the county and just stand around and watch things being done. And when the building—when they got finished with

the building, they couldn't get the gas companies to put gas in it, couldn't get a telephone. And they—we had to have wood heaters we put up in the building.

JD: Yeah, I've seen pictures of that stove.

RH: And they did some of everything to scare us out of there. Right from the highway over there—you probably came up through Mileston. You had to come across that railroad to get over there, and they would keep one or two highway patrolmen sitting there, stopping everybody that comes through, so that—to let people know not to try to come through because you're going to get a ticket or get your license taken away from you.

JD: Sort of the same way people going to Tougaloo College sometimes getting stopped, saying, "Don't go there."

RH: Um-hmm, yeah.

JD: That fall, why, a couple of new people came to town, Henry and Sue Lorenzi.

RH: Um-hmm, yeah.

JD: They lived in the center for a little while. Talk about Sue and Henry, and then I'm going to talk about your work at the center.

RH: Sue and Henry, when they came in, they were—just wasn't so sure where they was going to stay at. But when they got there and got to know some of the people there and realized what we had and what we needed there, they decided to stay. But people—everybody kind of took a liking to Sue and Henry. They would all—everybody would all come out to the center every day just to talk to Henry and Sue. And they were always—Henry was the one that looked like he had all the knowledge. He had answers to everything you came up with.

And he had asked me about working in the center, managing the community center, when they was getting ready to leave. And I was telling him I didn't have no skills for that. I didn't

know how to do anything like that. And he was telling me all of the things that I had that I didn't know of. He went down the line, telling me about what I had did for him since he had been there. And he was telling me that—he always told me I needed to write a book. I never did. But Henry was a good man and would always try to help the underdog. He just—whoever he thought needed you the most, he would let it be known. That these are the people you need to do things for and to try to encourage them.

But Henry and Sue did a lot to organize our community and all over the county. They finally eventually moved over in Lexington. But they were always coming back over and doing things to keep people together.

JD: Um-hmm. And he asked you to run the center, and you did.

RH: He did.

JD: Now, I want you to spend a little bit of time talking about your work there, because lots of people read about community centers but they don't have the foggiest idea what their purpose was.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: So, tell us about the Mileston center and what [0:40:00] services it provided and what kind of work you were doing.

RH: The main purpose of the center was to have a place for people to meet and to come together and talk about their problems or what the problems were in the county or what we could do to make it better. And it was like what I did was to keep all the records of everything that went on in our area in the county. And I was like to take all the messages coming in from wherever, you know, even out-of-the-state and everywhere. Send newsletters out. And there was about four other young women working with me, and I was just in charge of making sure that

everything—there was a record kept of everything and that everything was in the center that needed to be there, everything that we needed to keep the building running was there. I had—I would call people and inform them about meetings or whatever was going on across the county. Get out—I would get out newsletters to them and also send notices to people to let them know things that was going on in the county.

JD: Tell us about the health clinic.

RH: Oh, that was—like, you spoke of Josephine Disparti, and there was another lady. Her name was Helen, I believe.

JD: Helene Richardson?

RH: Um-hmm. Yeah, Helene, and there was another young lady. And they all—they came first just in the center they would help out. They gave people physical exams and everything, and whatever medical services they could render, they did it. And we finally were able to get a little room built for the clinic. And they started letting people come from all over the county, just like a regular doctor's office. And they stayed there at least, I know, all that summer, and they would come back once in a while. But they offered medical services to the county.

JD: And there was the Medical Committee for Human Rights was the organization running it, and a young doctor named Alvin Poussaint would come up.

RH: Alvin Poussaint, uh-huh.

JD: Did you know Poussaint?

RH: I knew him well. In fact, he used to stay in touch with me a lot.

[Recording begins skipping]

JD: But I think people [42:43] comprehensive community health centers which provide health care to over thirty million Americans now. That that all started in that little clinic in

Mileston. From there, they got the idea to expand and open health centers. And there are health centers here now, aren't there?

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: How do they operate?

RH: There's several Mallory clinics. There was a school out there that was named for this Dr. Arenia C. Mallory, and they have those clinics in a lot of towns. And they offer services to people that can't afford regular doctors. They have free service to some people, and some people you pay as you're able to.

JD: So, has health care improved around here from the time that you were—when you were, you or your family were sick on the plantation, what did you do?

RH: Take home remedies.

JD: Um-hmm. Did you ever see a doctor or—?

RH: I had never seen a doctor until I had my first child.

JD: Or been in a hospital?

RH: Never.

JD: And the rest of your family—did they?

RH: Never.

JD: Because they'd have to pay.

RH: Um-hmm, and my mom had all of us at home.

JD: And there were no black doctors in the county?

RH: No.

JD: So, there *have* been some changes there.

RH: There have.

JD: You're far too modest about your work in the center. I have something here that says you handled day to day center programs for kids, a kindergarten—

RH: Oh, yeah! I'm thinking of, you know, about Head Start. [Laughs] Yeah, we did. We did—the two years before we got federal money, we had decided that we wanted to open a school for kindergarten children. We didn't have a kindergarten at the time, and they were kindergarten-aged children. So, with the help of Sue and Henry, we set up a makeshift school for the children to come. We went around and canvassed to see what children [0:45:00] we could get to come.

And we had—Abe also gave us a truck when he built the center. And we finally learned how to drive it well enough that we would go around and pick up all the children and bring them to school and keep them there until 3:30 in the evening. We would feed them. Well, in the morning-time we would have stuff like grits or oatmeal, or milk and cookies, or whatever we could get. And the different farmers would give us things, different items to help out, and they would give us money for gas or either they would give us gas, put gas in the truck from their farming gas.

And we would go around and pick the children up and we would bring them back and we would do all kinds of things. We made clothes for them. We had sewing machines, and my sister and me knew how to sew a little bit, so we made clothing for all the children. And we would go through all kinds of activities. We had farmers to come out and build playground equipment. And we just did everything that you would do in a school with the help of Sue and Henry.

JD: Now, this was before Head Start?

RH: That was before Head Start. We didn't have any money.

JD: When you were doing everything that you were doing later on?

RH: Everything, basically, and sometimes I think it was better then, because you could kind of do what you wanted.

JD: Yeah.

RH: And didn't have all these rules.

JD: Didn't have any forms to fill out.

RH: And it was a good program. Everybody—children now, sometimes they'll come by and they—one little boy, I'll never forget him, we all called him Shorty. He said, when he—the first day he came to school, he said he cried so hard not to come, and we came and we picked him up anyway. And he went back home and he told his grandma, "Grandmama, that's the best school in the *world!* Because they will feed you three meals every day you go to school, and then they'll let you lay down and go to sleep, and *still* bring you back home!" [Laughter]

And he said, he told me he will never forget that; that will go with him the rest of his life. He said every time he goes somewhere and they start talking, and some people talk about their first teachers, said he'll go back and call my name and think about all the times that when he was scared and nervous, I would let him lay on my lap and rock him in the rocking chair. And he said, "I was at home. I had *two* grandmothers." But that was a good program, you know.

JD: I want to talk about your work in Head Start a little later. But now let's—I'd like to switch to another major area of your concern and activity, and that is voting and elections. And what you have is a county that is majority black with very few blacks voting, and this—you have—we talked about trying to register in April of '63. And then in 1965 the Voting Rights Act was passed and federal registrars came in. And how did you take advantage of this?

RH: Before the federal registrars came, we had tried to go out and register and we were blocked from that. Well, in fact, we were taking a lot of people out all the time. And when I first

went out, there were five of us women. And it was, like, when we went up to the courthouse, and the sheriff knew that we were there, all his deputies came out with the dogs and their billy clubs and their guns and everything. And I was real nervous, because I'm afraid of dogs. But they would walk right along beside you and let the dog be between them and you. And then, when they would go, "Rrrr," they would pull them back just a little bit, but they'd come back again.

I never will forget when I went—when I finally went in, they put me in a little room like a closet with a little desk in it, and they closed the door. And I'd been in there about an hour and I had finished, been finished, what I was filling out the paper, so I tried to open the door. And when I touched the doorknob, I heard the dog growling. I said, "Oh, my God." And every time I would touch the door even, he would growl. So, they had left him there, guarding the door. And it was about four hours later when they came and let me out. And I was *scared to death* in there.

JD: So, you were held as a prisoner while you were trying to—

RH: Because I was thinking if I come out, he's definitely going to attack me. [0:50:00]

JD: Yeah, you see, that's a story I've never heard before. I've heard of all kinds of intimidation but never anything like that.

RH: That's what they did, um-hmm. And the chancellor clerk had said to me, "Now, I know you know better!" He knew my grandparents. "I've known your people for years and years, and I know you know better. What are you doing out here anyway?" And so, I told him what I wanted. And he said, "You go home and do like your mama and your grandmama did. You don't need to come out here. This ain't for black folk."

And that's the way they did all of us that went, the four ladies that went with me. And we were able—we had to go back a second day for some of us, and we all went together because we knew how it was. But they never told us that we had passed the test until the federal registrars

came, and they found the records and everything. And it was like the next year, and they finally told us that we had passed the same, the first time we had gone out there.

JD: But they didn't—you passed it but they didn't tell you.

RH: Didn't tell you. They were supposed to send you a letter and notify you, but they didn't. They didn't tell us.

JD: So, it really took real courage before the Voting Rights Act to go in and try to register.

RH: Oh, yes, um-hmm.

JD: And then, the Voting Rights Act is passed, and the federal registrars come in, and it's a lot easier, isn't it?

RH: Um-hmm, it is.

JD: And, now, how did you get folks who had been afraid to vote, to register before saying it's okay now? What did you do to get them to the registrar?

RH: They started to after they saw so many people, and then there were—the main thing was when they started to see that there were houses available for them if they get put off the plantation. They was afraid of not having a place to live. And once they saw other people going, sometimes we would just get truckloads of people, all in the back of the truck, and take them out there. It took—you had to take them, though. Most people wouldn't just go on their own. Somebody had to be with them to, like, they had protection. And they—it took a lot of talking. And a lot of people said they were going and didn't for a long time until, you know, it got a little better, and they knew that everybody was going, and they finally started coming out.

JD: One of the things that was notable, I think, throughout the state—well, throughout the South—is that at the beginning, the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement, black professionals, the teachers, the preachers, were not around very much, were they?

RH: Um-um.

JD: Why was that?

RH: They—I think most of them thought that they stood in good with the white folk, and they didn't want them to think they were in there, because they were telling them that there was some crazy white folks coming in here, or some outside agitators and people, educated people, and people like there wasn't supposed to be. But I think they were mostly scared, and they were good they had that to hide behind some of the teachers thinking they would lose their jobs. Because Bernice Montgomery, from the beginning, she came down with us. She would come to Mileston for our meetings—

JD: She was a teacher?

RH: She was a teacher.

JD: And sort of stood out as a result.

RH: Uh-huh, yeah, but she came right away. But it took a lot of, a lot of talking and coaxing and, you know, having the meetings and everything. They would come to the meetings. Some of them would, you know, come and—because it was night and they thought wouldn't nobody know they were there, and they would come. And then, finally, when they saw everybody else voting, they decided to come on out.

JD: So, you got a lot of people registered. And then, it was time to start planning for elections.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: I was reading in Sue's book that you were very active in the 1966 election for congressional races, with Mr. Hayes running here. What did you do to mobilize people for that election?

RH: We had different—like, we had a lot of people that had cars to agree to—you know, we'd give gas for their travel, and they agreed to pick up people that needed it. We had people posted at the center that could take calls when there were some people needing to be picked up. And they— cars all over the county were going, picking people up and getting them to the polls and waiting and taking them back home and everything. [0:55:00]

But we had to let them know ahead of time, you know, that we had transportation available to them. And we had to have somebody for each area to find out how many people there needed to go and how many were willing to go, because most of them were afraid, so you had to go and get them. They wouldn't just come. Some people may have had cars, but they didn't. They were afraid to come on their own, so we had to make sure that they knew that we were with them and we were coming to pick them up.

JD: And it should be pointed out that this was all under the auspices of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

RH: It was.

JD: You were not part of the regular Democratic party.

RH: Exactly.

JD: Talk about your early work with the Freedom Democrats.

RH: Oh, well, we had different people in the county in different parts of the county that were in charge of their area. And the people in the communities knew who to get in touch with. They would, like, if they called in, you could tell them who they could get in touch with and who

would be able to—that day, you know, beforehand we had all kind of meetings all across the county, telling them what we was going to do, and where we was going to be at, and who was going to do what.

So, we had to get organized for that just like the real Democratic party. We had people all over the county and in place for people to get information from, to know what to do and everything, and to take them there, and take them to the polling places and let them know that—these people, some of them would even be afraid to go and say what they wanted to do, but you had to go and just talk for them. For some of them, we had to speak for them. But—

JD: In those early elections, was there intimidation at the polls?

RH: Oh, yes! I had an incident where this guy wanted to—his wife had never worked at the polls, and I was the manager, the receiving and returning manager. And the chancellor clerk then—the circuit clerk, that's who it was, was Calvin Moore. He had agreed to let this woman work in the position that I had had before. And then, he called me at home one night to tell me that he expected me to do what I had been doing all the time, because she was new and she wouldn't know. And I asked him who was going be carrying that title and be responsible for the election. He said she was. And I said, "Well, alright, that's what she'll be doing. So, I won't be doing it. She'll be doing it."

So, he came down there that day, because she told him that she couldn't do it. She didn't understand and she couldn't do it. She would rather not. I was put back in the position of being receiving and returning manager. And that evening—her husband was a truck driver. He had this big log truck. That evening, he came, and somebody told him that his wife wasn't working in that position. So, he came out there. He had been drinking and he was cursing everybody out. He

was going take her and take her home, and she wouldn't ever come back down there again. So, he had his gun and everything.

JD: Wow.

RH: But some of our people came in and got him out of there. And he—because it was a little—kind of scary at first because he was the only one with a gun, and then he was crazy because he was drunk. And he came and took her out of there, and she couldn't help us to close the election.

JD: Wow.

RH: I remember back then we had old buildings we had to vote in, and sometimes the heat wouldn't—wasn't no good. It would be so cold in there, and we have stayed there from—then we went in at six-thirty until three and four o'clock the next morning, counting. We had to count and do the tally.

JD: Oh, yeah.

RH: And that was rough, but we had to stick it out. There were several of us, and other people would come in just to be there for support. They could stand around; they just couldn't interfere with the election. So, some of our friends or the men in the community would come out, because it would be some of them there and some of us. But they would—it was rough.

JD: I remember—well, from my own experience and from others, that on election day, why, very often really rough-looking white people would park themselves right in front of the door. Wouldn't say anything; they'd just sit there. [1:00:00] And I was doing some poll watching in Canton, and cars with black families, black voters, would come, and they'd see these guys and they'd turn off and go away. There are all sorts of intimidation.

RH: That's what they were doing. They would—when time came for you to do the tallying, they would come and stand right—you know, they are able to observe, looking over your shoulder and everything, so they would come and they would be—they wouldn't say anything, but they would just come, you know, acting like [1:00:32].

JD: When you had voters who had trouble reading, how did you handle that? Were you able to go into the polling booth with them?

RH: Yes.

JD: Or how were they able to cast their vote the way they wanted to?

RH: We had to make sure they were—knew that there were people there that they could ask for help, that we couldn't just come and help them. But there were people there that they could ask for help, because it got so that so many people would ask me to help them that the other side started saying that—not wanting me to work at the polls. They started thinking I was doing something, because how would everybody know to ask me? But, see, that was just the communication we had with voters.

JD: Yeah, you had to really be set up so people wouldn't turn around and go away.

RH: Uh-huh, because they would. They would say, "I can't do this. I don't understand it." And they just—some wouldn't come out, you know, or rather they wouldn't come in. I never will forget a lady came and she had—when she came in the door, she had asked for me. And they wanted to know what she wanted with me and why she was asking for a poll official—was there trouble? And she said, "I was told that she could help me. I don't know how to vote, and she can help me."

And so, this white guy, his name was Bobby Lou, he told her she couldn't vote that day—if she didn't know how, she couldn't vote. And so, one of the poll watchers happened to

hear, and so he brought her over there and told her what [1:02:10]. Now, he got real upset, and the lady—his wife worked at the Welfare Office—and this lady was getting food stamps and a welfare check. They cut her services off and benefits until she could get it straightened out.

JD: Yeah. The 1966 elections were sort of a warm-up for the '67 elections. In Mississippi, the off-year elections are when all the local officials and state legislators are elected. And this was a very big time in Holmes County. Robert Clark was running for the state legislature. Tell us about Mr. Clark and why he was—was he a good candidate? And, if so, why?

RH: He was. He was, one thing, he was well-known all over the county. He had been a school teacher before that, and he had gone around and did all of his campaigning and everything, and everybody knew him. And it was kind of where everybody knew what they was going to do when they went out there. They tried everything to scare people back. They had people out there working for them, the white folks did, saying, telling the people what's going happen if they went out and try to vote for Representative Clark. There was a lot of people that would come back and report what they had said to them.

So, by us having somebody stationed at every place, outside and inside, we had people out there that would be there to assist anybody that had trouble. They would make sure that if a person coming up to vote—they wouldn't know who was who, whether they was—they even had some black people out there working for them. So, we had to try to make sure that they knew that we were there and able to help them. So, it had gotten, by then, so that people knew what they was going to do before they left home.

And that's how we were successful in this area all the time, because people would always—if they knew that an election was coming up, they would call either me or somebody else to find out what candidate are we supporting, or what are we doing now, when is the day,

and where do we go? They would call and get all that information. And then, we would tell that person, "Tell your neighbor and tell your sister or your brother or whoever, so they can know what to do when they get there." But that was some of the ways that we always were able to do the word-of-mouth thing. We couldn't count on getting to everybody, but we knew that we would always know somebody that knew the next person, and they would, you know, make sure they knew what to do.

JD: Lawrence Guyot [1:05:00] in his preface to Sue Sojourner's book was talking about Holmes County as being the best organized county in the state. And there were a number of other counties with black majorities, but in that election in 1967, the election of Robert Clark was the *only* successful legislative race, and Clark became the first African American to sit in the state legislature in the twentieth century.

RH: Um-hmm.

JD: Was there a big party after that election? [Laughs]

RH: Oh, yes, all over the county and state and everywhere! Yes, it was! People were really proud. It made—Representative Clark was—well, whatever was going on in the county, if Representative Clark approved it, we knew that's what we needed to do.

JD: We're going to—I would like, then, to look now at your professional career in Head Start. Talk about CDGM and how you got involved and how that operated.

RH: Well, CDGM, Sue and Henry brought this to us, also. The state had got funded for a six-weeks program, and we had to get the people that we wanted to work and get a committee and everything to set up for the center. And Mileston was the only center in that five-week, six-week program, and we went down to Mount Beulah in Edwards, Mississippi, for a week. And we stayed there and got trained on what the government expected of us with that program. And

we—it turned out just great! Everything worked out well. It was getting—we thought we had it for just as long as we needed it. It was really a good program. And I remember Polly Greenberg.

JD: Um-hmm. Do you know Tom Levin?

RH: Tom Levin, yes, uh-huh. And I was, along with the chairperson for our center, I was the secretary and I was also an assistant teacher. So, we had to drive to Jackson, like, every Friday. Like, this Friday we carried the payroll and all the information to get what we needed for the center, the operation of the center. We would take the paperwork down there. The next week we would go and pick the checks up.

And we had an account in a bank in Tchula, and in the beginning the bank refused to cash our checks. They said they didn't know what it was and they had never heard of it. And the only way we got checks cashed, we—there was a supermarket, which, you know, that they would cash our checks. But they wouldn't even cash the checks.

JD: Did the banks come around eventually?

RH: They came around. It was a guy that had a supermarket, Rupert Taylor. He finally talked them into it. And I remember there was another guy. His name was D. C. Cohen. They was talking about how was the funds going to come to us? And they wanted us to get a committee and let them be over the funding part of the program. And we refused that night to do that. And Representative Clark probably will want to tell you all about it, so I'll let him do it. [Laughs]

JD: Okay.

RH: When we had that meeting that night, and he thought I was from outside of Mississippi. I was asking some questions. But he'll tell you that. He loves to do that himself.

But, anyway, we—there's a guy that has a store over in Lexington, a dry goods store. His name is Cohen. I remember him and Hazel Brannon Smith. They had been in the meeting with us, and they couldn't get us to do what they wanted us to do. And they were talking—we were walking down the stairs, and I was kind of right behind them—and they said, "These niggers are going to suffer because they don't know what they're doing. They can't handle no money like that."

And I remember Mr. Cohen saying, and it hurt my feelings but it was true, he said, "You know, Hazel, leave them niggers alone." Said, "My motto is give them anything they ask you for, because they're going to bring it back and give it back to you the next day." I said, "Well, well." She said, "Well, they're going suffer for it, because they could have had this money and they won't get it." And I told her—she was kind of, you know, she had been to our center, she had talked to us, and she was just a friend to everything.

JD: Yeah. This is Hazel Brannon Smith?

RH: Hazel Brannon Smith.

JD: The white editor of the newspaper.

RH: So, I told her, I said, "Mrs. Smith," I said, "One thing about it, we're used to suffering. [1:10:00] And I know some people that's not used to it, so that's who it's going to hurt." And I—she didn't say anything else. We kept walking. But anyway, it was rough that first year. They wouldn't—every time the money would come in, the government would veto it. And then, they would have to override it to get the money, so that's more time.

But I remember at the end of those six weeks, they didn't tell us anything, when I knew anything, we knew anything at the center where I worked, they were coming in to get all the furniture and everything out that they had given, the chairs, the tables, and everything. And they

said there was something misspent somehow. I don't know what it was. But, anyway, we started working right away on trying to get re-funded.

JD: Okay, let me just stop right here, because we should know that CDGM was voted as the best Head Start program in the country that summer. And tell us about what it was like to be working in that center, about the kids, about the program for the day.

RH: Oh, it was wonderful! We had—the funding money was enough so that everything you needed to operate was covered. They had food like you would get at a restaurant. They had steaks, pork chops, sausage and eggs, and everything, for breakfast and lunch and everything. If someone came there at three o'clock, there was still some food that you could serve. Sometimes the people from Jackson would come, and they would come and eat. But we got *everything*. We had been using equipment and stuff that the farmers, the different carpenters, built for us. But we got everything we needed, and it was so beautiful. The children just—

JD: What about the teaching? What were you trying to teach?

RH: We were trying to teach them just like regular how to—well, first we had to get them used to coming out and being away from home and familiar people, you know. And they would—I remember the first group we had, we had a shower in the center, and some of the children would come just like they picked them up out of the bed and sent them there. And we made clothes for them, so we would have to get in the shower with them. We would have to wear something that we could get in the shower with the children and bathe them in the shower. They had never seen a shower. Some of them had never seen commodes in the bathroom before. They had outside toilets.

And it was—we would teach the children—we started out we would teach them—we did this even before we had money. We would teach them by letting them tell us things about, that

they knew, and we would write it down. And then, the next day, we would read it back to them. And it would be like—I think Polly Greenberg had a book she wrote about some things that we did like that. But we taught them how to use a toilet, how to bathe themselves. We taught them how to just share with other children, just everything. We taught them how to speak.

And after they had been there for, I'd say, about that first two weeks, it was like they didn't want to go home in the evening time. They were just so proud of being there. And when we had the first little graduation, we were so proud that what they had learned. And some of the teachers came from the school, and they couldn't believe that those children had learned—

JD: ABCs and everything?

RH: And how to write their names. They could print their names and they could recognize every child in the class, recognize their names. Like, we had cards for the children with their names on them. We had chairs, and we would practice with them, going and getting everybody's chairs. Every name you called, they could go and find that chair. And they could find the colors; all the chairs were a different color, and the tables, some of them were different colors. So, that's how we taught, with what we had, whatever we had. We would go outside and let the children find things outside. They would count the cars, they would count buildings, they would count the trees, the flowers, and everything. And that taught them so much.

It was just that some of the parents didn't know some of those things to teach their children. That's why they didn't know. And I learned a lot that year myself that that's how children learn. They learn whatever their environment is. And you could just see how the children was progressing. And it was so hurtful when they said the money was gone, [1:15:00] and we couldn't get funded. And we started working on it.

JD: Let me just ask about that. The CDGM, although it was the best program in the country, was not refunded because Senator John Stennis and others believed that it was a civil rights organization.

RH: Um-hmm, that's what they said.

JD: And they didn't like money coming into the state they couldn't control.

RH: They couldn't control, um-hmm.

JD: So, what happened here when you found that no longer—you know, it was temporary funding for a while, and then they cut it off completely. How did Head Start evolve through all this in Holmes County, in Mileston?

RH: We started working all over again, just like the Movement. We started working, getting people together and trying to—we even got a bus. My second daughter and three other children and one of our teachers, her name is Zelma—she lives in Cleveland now—but they went to Washington to lobby for funds for Head Start. And we all got together and rented a Greyhound bus for the state, and everybody sent however many children they wanted to, and they went.

JD: Did you go on that trip?

RH: I did not. I was always stuck in the center. Can you believe that? [Laughs]

JD: Oh, yeah! Yeah, I heard that was a wonderful experience.

RH: Uh-huh, yes, it was.

JD: You just turned those kids loose on a congressman. [Laughs]

RH: Yes, that's what we did. And then, after that, we worked for three months without funds again. And we brought the food out, we worked just like when we had—we kept the

program going just like when we had funds. And we worked until May of the next year, I believe, and finally got funding again.

JD: Tell us about—well, we've kept you long enough, but I want you to talk some about what you've been doing in the years since the Movement years.

RH: Well, I've gone to college.

JD: Where did you go to college?

RH: Tougaloo.

JD: Tougaloo?

RH: Um-hmm. And it's such a long time ago. I had gone and got a two-year degree at first. And I'm thinking, you know, before we only had to have a high school certificate to work with Head Start. But every time they changed, we had to keep going. And finally I got a CDA credential. And then a couple of years ago, they said we had to go back to school. So, I had been going at times, but I had eight children [laughs] that had to go to school first. So, I had to let them go, and when they got finished I started back. And then, my health started to kind of fail me. I'm a diabetic, a Type 2 diabetic, so it was a little much for me, and I stopped.

But then I had—I only needed about three hours to graduate, but I just kept putting it off. And finally I went back down there and I met Dr. [1:18:02]. And he told me—now, it was in '78 when I got my two-year degree. And he was saying he wasn't sure if the college would accept everything I had, but they had a way that they could help me to brush up on some of it, and that's what we're doing now. But I kept—I've been working at Head Start forty-seven years now, and I'm still there.

JD: Wow! That is amazing!

RH: I'm still there, yeah.

JD: Mrs. Head, thank you so much for sharing your story with us. This was inspirational, and I know the people who read the transcript and watch this at the African American History Museum will be as excited as we've been, as we are here, too, to have you tell the story.

RH: Well, I hope I did it right. [Laughs]

JD: You did! [Laughs] You nailed it!

[Recording ends at 1:18:59]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Transcribed by Sally C. Council